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Steps to consider when crafting an article introduction

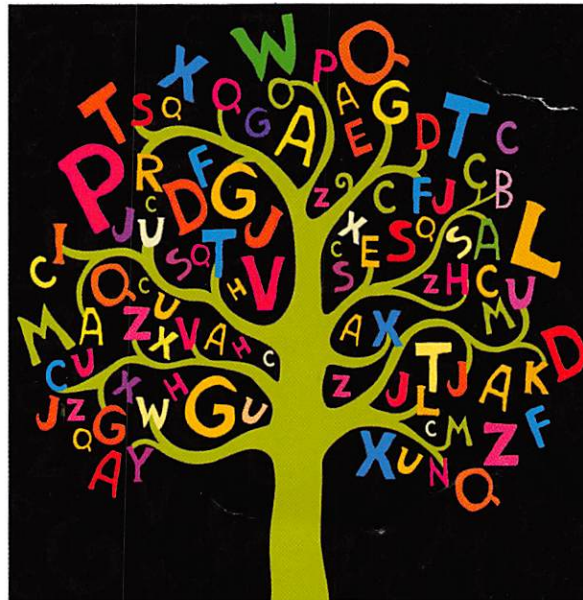
The introduction is perhaps the most important section of an article, but unfortunately it can be notoriously difficult to write. To help make the process less painful and more productive, Meagan Kittle Autry, the Director of Thesis and Dissertation Support Services at NC State University, shared advice for writing exceptional introductions in a recent TAA webinar titled “How to Write an Introduction That Will Get Your Article Accepted.”

According to Kittle Autry, there are three key elements to consider when writing an introduction that can impact the success of your article being selected for publication. First, research articles are becoming increasingly uniform across disciplines and highly conventional, so a large part of getting your article published is establishing yourself as part of the academic community by demonstrating that you understand and can follow the writing norms used by academic journals. Second, you must consider your audience of journal editors, peer reviewers, and readers in your field, for whom your personal interest in the topic is not enough—you must establish in your introduction that your work is significant for the field and offers something new to help move the field forward. Related to this is the final element, which is the concept of writing for the journal, which involves tailoring your introduction for your target journal and that journal’s specific audience.

In order to accomplish these goals, Kittle Autry suggests following these three steps from linguist John Swales’ “Create a Research Space” (CARS) Model for Introductions:

1) Establish a territory. This first step involves establishing your topic and its significance by claiming that the topic is of central interest to your field, making generalizations about the topic, and reviewing previous research. Your first sentence should state your topic and allude to its significance in your field. Kittle Autry states that this strong opening sentence is the key element that often differentiates published work from unpublished work.

The opening sentence should be followed up by a short literature review in which you describe what is currently known in your field, citing literature to support your generalizations. The studies you choose to cite will also help establish your identity as someone who understands the scholarly conversations currently happening in your field. Cite important research from your target journal to show that your topic is connected to the literature that readers of that journal consider valuable. Some phrases that can help you establish



your topic’s centrality to your field include “there has been growing interest in,” “has become a major issue,” and “has become an important aspect of.”

2) Create a niche. Next, it is important to establish a need for your present research. This step involves indicating a gap in previous research, proposing an extension of previous research, and in some fields such as engineering, presenting a positive justification for your current study. The academe considers problems and unknowns worthy of investigation, so after you review the current literature on your topic, use a contrastive turn such as “however,” “despite,” “little is known,” or “previous research failed to determine” in order to transition from the established knowledge to the unknown or unsolved and thereby justify your research. Using these

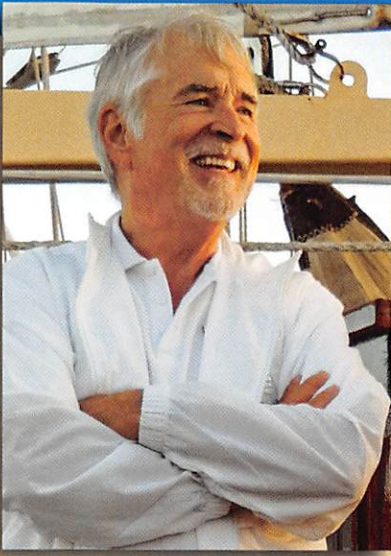
contrastive turns will also allude to your research problem or question.

For scholars involved in highly interdisciplinary work, the first two steps in this model may need to be repeated since it may be necessary to establish a topic from the perspective of multiple fields in order to connect all the pieces for your research.

3) Occupy the niche. After establishing that a research need exists, it is important to show how your current work meets that need. This can be accomplished in part through outlining the purpose and main features of the study. In some disciplines, this portion of the introduction also involves listing research questions or hypotheses. Writers in certain disciplines or writers who choose to follow an unconventional organization for the body of their article should also preview the organization of the article here as well. It is in this portion of the introduction that academic writers typically include a first person reference (e.g. “In this article, we report the results. . .”) and make the first explicit references to the text at hand (“The aim of this paper is to. . .”).

Following these three moves will help you to create a solid outline, but to craft a truly strong introduction, it is important to apply the model to popular, well-received, or canonical articles in your field to see how those authors tackle each step. This comparison will help you determine ways to tailor your introduction to your specific field or target journal; for example, it will help you make decisions such as how much literature to review in your introduction and whether or not to use the first person when introducing your current study. With this model as a guide, your introduction will be much more likely to inspire editors to give your research the serious consideration it deserves. ■

To listen to Kittle Autry’s full webinar and other TAA Presentations on Demand, visit TAAonline.net/presentations-on-demand



Building a web, maintaining enthusiasm, and creating a method to the textbook production madness

Robert W. Christopherson is Professor Emeritus of Geography, American River College (1970-2000). He is the author of the leading

physical geography texts in the U.S. and Canada, all published by Pearson Prentice Hall, first edition 1992. He and his nature photographer wife Bobbe have completed twelve expeditions to the Arctic and Antarctic regions since 2003, gathering information and photos for his books, *Geosystems*, 8/e, *Elemental Geosystems*, 7/e, *Geosystems Canadian Edition*, 3/e, and *Applied Physical Geography*, 8/e.

Here Christopherson shares some of the secrets to his success, including the value of building an integrated web for your work, maintaining enthusiasm, and organizing for optimal production.

TAA: As the author of the market-leading physical geography textbook series, how has enthusiasm for your work played a role in your authoring success?

Robert Christopherson: “The key to having genuine enthusiasm for the work is the degree to which it is integrated into your teaching, your work, and your life. Authoring is an isolating task by its nature—analogue to lighthouse or fire-lookout duty. I feel it is best to set the work in a full virtual web for a connected sense in which the book is a kind of focal point. This connectedness supports the author and sets a base on which true, sustainable enthusiasm is built.

I joined TAA in 1989, where I met other authors in the same boat with similar experiences—this was invaluable to my career! With my books in hand, I was able to teach from my text for the balance of my classroom career. Teaching in the classroom crucible helped build the text, and the authoring work enhanced my teaching methods—show, discuss, apply—a synergy that fueled more confidence and therefore more sustainable enthusiasm.

Enthusiasm goes beyond the field of study, or the contract in hand. Rather it is rooted in embracing all aspects of the task. Adrenaline rush, royalty dreaming, ego inflation, and even a printed edition, cannot fuel or sustain the enthusiasm needed for the heavy lifting of authoring over a long haul.

As I mentioned above, there is an on-going attempt at integration among elements in my work, forming a supportive web. The constant challenge is to keep a singularity of sorts in mind, integrating purpose, work, knowledge, beliefs, the craft, expeditions, teaching, and the text project—all together. I think genuine enthusiasm arises from the emotional support of thinking of such a supportive web surrounding the focal point.”

TAA: Is your enthusiasm fueled mainly by your subject matter, or by the writing process as well? How do you integrate your research and writing processes?

RC: “All of the above, certainly, enthusiasm flows from the wonder of words and infinite possibilities as writing is a true creative art. Writing and editing feel like working with oils or watercolors or clay modeling, as you create something on a blank page. However, the craft is just a tool of expression for research-informed text and art construction—outline, text, art programs, caption manuscript, pedagogy, and compositing.

Again, feeling the full web of variables helps support the work overall. Simply sitting down to a blank page to ‘write my book,’ is a poor approach. I’ve talked to authors that wrote the manuscript and then added the figures, arts and photos as an afterthought, as opposed to integrated in the work. In a holistic approach, the arts, photos, key terms, key learning concepts (behavioral objectives), and more, are all in place before the first word is typed. When you actually begin to compose the words, the work is supported and surrounded by the web you build and maintain. The caption manuscript should be crafted in its own document, with both documents open on screen, as you choreograph the balance of words. Ah, there is that feeling of enthusiasm!

I use large broadsheets of paper on which I interpret, synthesize, record, and extract material during research, especially in the first edition of each text. These sheets end up with lines, connections and highlights, and are set on the console that surrounds my keyboard and monitor. I compose the early drafts from these elements. I find this more effective; it allows my view of the whole as opposed to note cards.”

TAA: At times when you have lost enthusiasm for your writing, what have you done to regain your momentum and focus?

RC: “I admit to reaching moments of fatigue from long hours, vexing production issues, and the like, but have not experienced a loss of enthusiasm for the work. In the web analogy I constructed above, if someone felt a loss of enthusiasm, I imagine it is caused by losing sight of the ‘big picture,’ of setting yourself in one compartment of the task, out on a loose thread in the web. Solution: reconnect all aspects of the work to what you are stuck on at the moment. In your mind’s eye, have a virtual audience of earnest students in the writing studio. Your work is helping those students learn, i.e., change behavior!”

TAA: Successfully authoring multiple books and editions requires extreme organization and critical thinking. Discuss the key aspects of your method to the production madness.

RC: “I have developed five key aspects to my production process:

1) Thoroughly organize your computer desktop for the project with folders by chapter for manuscript, photo research (including cover,